

Way of the Cross

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The door to heaven is narrow. Work hard to get in.... (Luke 13:24)

The Only way

There are many followers of Jesus in the Body of Christ. We begin to follow Jesus when we accept Him as our personal savior. However, the question I want to ask is "how do we follow Him?" Can we follow Him any way, or is there only one way to follow Jesus? According to the Bible, there is only one way and that way is the narrow way. Is it possible for a born again Christian not to follow Jesus the narrow way? Yes, it is possible. Read these words of Jesus from Luke 13:24-30.

"The door to heaven is narrow. Work hard to get in, because many will try to enter,²⁵ but when the head of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. Then you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Lord, open the door for us!' But he will reply, 'I do not know you.'²⁶ You will say, 'But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'²⁷ And he will reply, 'I tell you, I don't know you. Go away, all you who do evil.'

²⁸ *"And there will be great weeping and gnashing of teeth, for you will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets within the Kingdom of God, but you will be thrown out.²⁹ Then people will come from all over the world to take their places in the Kingdom of God.³⁰ And note this: Some who are despised now will be greatly honored then; and some who are greatly honored now will be despised then." (Luke 13:24-30)*

Luke 13 : 24-30 makes it very clear that we have to work hard to enter through the narrow door. In verses 25 & 26 Jesus is talking about believers who did not work hard and failed to enter by the narrow door. They say they ate and drank with Jesus. This signifies that they had fellowship with Him and still failed to enter heaven because they did not want to take the narrow way!

Remember, there is only one way to follow Jesus and that way is the narrow way, which is, "The Way of the Cross". We need to understand this truth very clearly if we are serious about following Jesus. **We cannot follow Jesus on our terms and according to our wishes. We need to follow Him on His terms and according to His wishes.**

Beware of the incorrect teaching many irresponsible teachers bring into the Body of Christ which says that we can follow Jesus any way. They want to substitute the narrow way with "any way". They want to substitute the way of the cross with the broad and easy way.

*3" You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose the easy way. 14 But the gateway to life is small, and the road is narrow, and **only a few ever find it** .(Mathew 7:13,14)(Bold Mine)*

Remember... the way to life is narrow and only a few will ever find it! Please do not run with the crowd. Do not be deceived by false teachers who claim million people attendance in their "crusades". Just because million people attend a meeting does not mean that truth is preached there! Do not be fooled by numbers and statistics! What matters is the truth... not numbers! The Bible makes it very clear that very few will find the right way. It is easier to gather a crowd than it is to preach the truth!

The narrow way involves putting aside self, carrying the cross and following Him.

Putting aside Selfish ambition

*Then Jesus said to the disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, **you must put aside your selfish ambition**, shoulder your cross, and follow me.²⁵ If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life. (Bold mine) (Mathew 16:24,25).*

Putting aside selfish ambition is the most difficult thing for many Christians these days, because this is exactly the opposite of what the world preaches today. The world says that you need to have selfish ambition to succeed. It is this message that prosperity preachers also preach – shamelessly. Jesus explains this truth a little deeper in verse 25. He says that if you try to keep your life, you will lose it, but if you give up your life for me, you will find true life. In other words, the more you try to grab and keep for yourself the more you will lose and the more you give up for me, the more you will gain.

This again is the complete opposite of what the world and the prosperity preachers teach today. The world says, "Grab all you can" & "Can all you can". The prosperity preachers make it sound spiritual and say "Claim everything and take everything for you in the name of Jesus". It is always me, my family, my body, my career, my job etc...

That is why putting aside selfish desire and ambition is very difficult for Christians these days. I know of many believers who once talked about denying self and carrying the cross. Now they have completely forgotten these truths, have joined the main stream, and have started to flow with the current.

Another harmful attitude among Christians these days is to claim their own desires as the will of God. Anything and everything that comes into our mind or any thing we desire cannot become the will of God. It is normal and human to get desires. However, those desires can ruin our lives if we do not validate them with the Word of God and find out whether they line up with His will. It is sad to see that many in the Body of Christ lack this ability to discern the will of God.

Why is Jesus asking us to put aside selfish desires? What is wrong in having our own ambitions? For example, a father wants his son to become a doctor. A young man desires in his heart to become a pilot. These are desires that people normally have. Is it wrong to have such ambitions? What is "selfish ambition?"

Any desire that is not validated by the Word of God and not lined up with the will of God is a selfish desire. Having desires or ambition is not wrong. Nevertheless, we must be careful to discern whether it comes out of selfishness or according to the will of God.

Over the years, I have spoken with many Christians with great ambitions and desires. They sounded very spiritual and asked me to pray for the fulfillment of their desires. However, when I asked them whether those desires and ambitions were inspired by God and in line with His will, many of them could not answer in the affirmative! Because deep down inside they knew that forces of materialism and a quest for money, power and success drove their ambitions and desires.

It is this, the Lord calls "selfish ambitions". Many believers have fallen for the forces of materialism these last days. Many believers run after these worldly things and preachers who promise the fulfillment of their carnal desires. This is the reason why prosperity preaching is so popular in the Body of Christ these days. Prosperity preachers are popular because **they preach what people want to hear (II Timothy 4: 3).**

Their preaching tell Christians that it is possible to serve God and money (Mathew 6:24). In effect, they tell Christians that it is possible to accommodate God and the "world". It is disappointing to note that this is what many people want to hear!

It is these Christians - who serve God and money the Lord calls "half-baked".

Half-baked Christians

⁸*My people of Israel mingle with godless foreigners, picking up their evil ways. Now they have **become as worthless as a half-baked cake!** (Hosea 7 :8) (Bold mine)*

One of the reasons for the pathetic condition of the Body of Christ these days is because of the half-baked Christians with selfish ambitions - disguised as God's will. They are encouraged and led by half-committed preachers who feed their selfish ambitions by twisting God's word. They are the ones who come on TV and shamelessly promise that all your problems will be gone and all your selfish ambitions would be fulfilled if only you would take the phone and pledge them some money.

The reason for so much materialism and "world" inside the Church these days is the lack of complete commitment to live according to the Word of God. Many have the willingness to live according to God's word, as long as they do not have to surrender 100% of their desires and plans. Some of God and some of the world. Some things done according to the word of God and others according to the standards of the world. The Lord hated this double-hearted commitment with Israel.

In Hosea 1:2, the Lord tells Hosea to marry a prostitute. *'When the Lord first began speaking to Israel through Hosea, he said to him, "Go and marry a prostitute, so some of her children will be born to you from other men'*

The reason God wanted Hosea to marry a prostitute is to demonstrate to the prophet the unfaithfulness and the half-hearted devotion of Israel. If you read the whole chapter, you will understand the heart of God. It is like the cry of a loving husband who loves his wife, in spite of her unfaithfulness. The Lord compares Hosea's unfaithful wife to Israel. She wanted the provision & protection that comes from her husband, at the same time she also wanted the pleasure that comes from sleeping with other men. This was the condition of Israel too. They wanted the provision & protection the Lord gave, at the same time they also wanted to enjoy the evil ways of the godless

foreigners by worshipping their idols. God hated this half-hearted devotion with Israel.

The Body of Christ these days is making the same mistake Israel made during Hosea's time. Mingling with the godless and picking up their evil ways... Due to this mingling, they have become as half-baked cake...good for nothing. These half-baked Christians do not go away completely from God, because they want the provision & protection that the Lord gives. At the same time, they also want to keep all the materialism and the love for the things of the world with them. They want God and they want all the things of the world too!

It is this mingling or mixing of the Godly with the worldly that is very dangerous. It is dangerous because it makes us insensitive to our real spiritual condition. That is why many false teachers say that these are "glorious days" for the Body of Christ, when in fact these are the most corrupted and compromised. They are like an old man with graying hair, unaware of how weak and old he has become.

⁹*Worshipping foreign gods has sapped their strength, but they don't even know it. Israel is like an old man with graying hair, unaware of how weak and old he has become. (Hosea 7 :9)*

Israel was insensitive and kept on worshipping idols, at the same time worshipping God. Their condition was pathetic because they were worshipping idols but were insensitive to it. They built altars; they did all the rituals, at the same time they were worshipping idols.

¹¹*Israel has built many altars to take away sin, but these very altars became places for sinning!* ¹²*Even though I gave them all my laws, they act as if those laws don't apply to them. (Hosea 7: 11,12)*

The same thing is happening in the Body of Christ these days. They keep on doing the usual things like going to Church, giving offerings etc., at the same time worshipping idols. They praise God, pray, at the same time fill their minds with materialism. They have the word of God that clearly tells us not to copy the behavioral pattern of this world, but live as if it does not apply to them.

Many believers and even ministers are idol worshippers these days! Yes... it is true they do not fall before an idol made of stone or wood to worship. However, they have their own idols and they worship it. It is with tears in my eyes I see so many men & women of God who were once on fire for God, running after money, recognition and fame! They want to serve God, but also want to keep their idols with them.

"Don't be greedy for the good things of this life, for this is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). What is idolatry according to God's word? Love for good things of this world is idolatry. Wanting to own more than we need is idolatry. Loving your money, job, car or anything more than God is idolatry!

¹³*The people of Israel love their rituals of sacrifice, but to me their sacrifices are all meaningless (Hosea 7 : 13)*

The Israelites gave many sacrifices to God, but the Lord hated it all! The Lord hated their worship because they were also worshipping idols! No matter how much we praise Him or worship him, nothing impresses God if we have the love of the world in us. Nothing short of complete devotion pleases God. Lust for the things and pleasures of this world is idolatry. Let us never forget that. Jesus has asked us to take our cross, and follow Him. However, it is sad to note that many these days want to follow Him by taking a big shopping bag!

"Followers" of Jesus

In Jesus' times, a group followed him. They were also followers of Jesus. Everywhere He went they followed Him. The apostle John writes about this group in John 6.

The next morning, back across the lake, crowds began gathering on the shore, waiting to see Jesus. For they knew that he and his disciples had come over together and that the disciples had gone off in their boat, leaving him behind. ²³ *Several boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the Lord had blessed the bread and the people had eaten.* ²⁴ *When the crowd saw that Jesus wasn't there, nor his disciples, they got into the boats and went across to Capernaum to look for him.* ²⁵ *When they arrived and found him, they asked, "Teacher, how did you get here?" (John 6:22-25)*

The above-mentioned incident happened after the Lord fed the 5000 people. These people waited hours to see Jesus. They reached the meeting venue even before Jesus arrived there. They were literally following Him everywhere He went. Nevertheless, Jesus did not applaud them for following Him. Just read the following from the scriptures.

²⁶ *Jesus replied, "The truth is, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you saw the miraculous sign."* ²⁷ *But you shouldn't be so concerned about perishable things like food. (John 6:26,27)*

Jesus knew what was in their hearts. Even though they followed Him, only Jesus knew why they were following Him. They did not follow Him because they wanted to hear God's word nor did they follow Him because they wanted to grow spiritually. They followed Him because HE GAVE THEM FOOD. It was for the food He gave they

followed Him!

In my opinion, this is one of the most heartbreaking incidents in the Bible. The son of God is with them. He is the creator of all universes and has all the treasures of the heavenly kingdom. He wanted to bless them with so many truths about His kingdom, but these people were more worried about their stomachs than about any truth about the kingdom of God! They followed Him as long as their physical needs were met. However, when Jesus began to teach the word of God, they started to murmur and started to argue. They were not willing to follow Him any further!

⁴¹ Then the people began to murmur in disagreement because he had said, "I am the bread from heaven." ⁴² They said, "This is Jesus, the son of Joseph. We know his father and mother. How can he say, 'I came down from heaven'?" (John 6:41,42)

They thought that following Jesus would bring them free food, no pain, no trouble and no problems. However, when Jesus began to teach deeper things from the scriptures they began to leave one by one. They were with Him as long as He was the Jesus they wanted Him to be. When He started to talk about some serious spiritual matters, they did not want to listen! Because they only wanted that which could satisfy their physical needs.

This is how many in the Body of Christ follow Jesus. They go to every crusade and meeting that will get their physical needs fulfilled. It is not wrong to get our physical needs fulfilled. God fulfills our physical needs also. However, it is pathetic to see that many run after only these perishable things that matter on this earth and ignore the deeper spiritual things that are eternal.

At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him (John 6: 66)

Even many of His disciples left, because deeper things of the spirit went over their head.

They were not willing to follow Jesus by putting aside their selfish ambitions. They were willing to follow Him as long as they could get something from Him. They were willing to follow Him as long as they could follow Him with the "world" in them. When they realized that they had to give up their long cherished ambitions, desires and the things of the world, they left. Because many of them came to Jesus to get their selfish ambitions fulfilled! However, when Jesus told them to give it up and follow Him... they left.

On the other hand, a small minority did stay with Him.

Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you going to leave, too?" ⁶⁸ Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You alone have the words that give eternal life. ⁶⁹ We believe them, and we know you are the Holy One of God." (John 6: 67-69)

Just the 12 disciples stayed and all the others left. Imagine this... just a short while ago there were more than 5000 people with Him and he fed them all. Now, he was left with just the 12 with whom he began! This is the price Jesus had to pay, for teaching the truth!

If Jesus had wanted to keep a big crowd follow Him, He could have easily done it by just giving them all they asked for and preaching them all they wanted to hear. He could have had a big crowd following Him by giving them food and by doing miracles everyday, without preaching anything from the scriptures. However, Jesus was not bothered about the numbers. He was not bothered about how many millions attend His meetings. The numbers and statistics did not mean anything to Him. All that mattered to Him was that they should hear the truth.

²⁵ Great crowds were following him. He turned around and addressed them as follows: ²⁶ "Anyone who wants to be my follower must love me far more than he does his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters—yes, more than his own life—otherwise he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And no one can be my disciple who does not carry his own cross and follow me.

The truth about loving God more than your mother, father, wife, children, brothers, sisters was not exciting to them. Carrying the cross made no sense to them.

The Body of Christ also does not want to hear such teaching these days. Many people do not want to hear the truth. It is about these times the apostle Paul warned Timothy. People have an itching ear to the truth and they run after people who preach only what they want to hear.

³ For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear. ⁴ They will reject the truth and follow strange myths. (II Timothy 4: 3,4).

The truth is not exciting to many these days! The truth about Christian life that involves carrying the cross is not exciting to many.

What is the Cross?

If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. (Mathew 10:38)

What does the cross mean to a follower of Jesus? We all know about the cross the Lord Jesus carried. But in Mathew 10:38 Jesus is not talking about His cross. He is talking about a different cross. This is the cross every believer who wants to follow Jesus need to take.

What does Jesus mean by cross, here? The Lord is talking about the personal cross that every believer needs to carry. He makes it very clear that anyone who wants to follow Him must carry his or her cross. According to Jesus, the cross is not optional. Anyone wants to follow Him must carry it.

The cross means to us the same thing it meant to Jesus. The cross meant humiliation and pain to Jesus. It means the same thing to a Christian. **To us it means that we should be willing to publicly identify with Him, to experience certain opposition, humiliation, disappointments and to be willing even to face even suffering and death for His sake. This is cross to us.**

The cross could mean different things to different people. By cross I am not just talking about physical suffering, although to some it involves physical suffering. **Cross... is any experience or a part in our lives that humbles us and helps us come closer to the Lord.** I know of a young believer who testified that in the earlier part of his life, he despised people without jobs. He always thought of them as losers. Then, suddenly he lost his job and in spite of his experiences, he could not find any job for a long time. He had to carry the cross of unemployment for some time. This experience humbled him greatly and now he understands, sympathizes and helps people without jobs.

To this man, the long period of unemployment was his cross. He carried it and learnt humility. This brought glory to God. I can testify of many incidents, which was the cross I carried that molded and humbled me. The Lord does not say that all our lives will be filled with suffering and pain. All Jesus is saying is that we should be willing to carry the cross and follow Him whenever He wants us to. It is the willingness to carry the cross He expects from every believer.

Because it was by going to the cross, Jesus demonstrated His complete and utter obedience to His father. He wanted nothing of Him and everything of what the Father wanted from Him. Jesus' complete surrender to His father's will was demonstrated at the cross. Jesus put aside his own will and His desires at the cross.

It was His willingness to give up all His rights as the son of God and His willingness to carry the cross, which brought glory to God and salvation to all humanity.

Why the Cross?

*So even though Jesus was God's Son, **he learned obedience from the things he suffered.** (Bold mine) (Hebrews 5:8)*

This verse from the Bible took me a long time to digest. The full meaning of this verse was so powerful that I kept thinking about it for a long time. It was hard for me to understand that Jesus, the son of God had to learn something. Nevertheless, the author of Hebrews makes it very clear that even Jesus learned obedience through the things he suffered. If Jesus had to learn obedience... and the only way He could learn it... is through the things He suffered, how much more should we be ready to learn obedience the way he did?

Please do not believe the teachers who teach lies and promise that Christian life is life in a bed of roses. They are the ones who follow Jesus by the broad way. God has called us to live a life, which involves pain and disappointments some times. These things mould, teach and humble us. God is more concerned about our spiritual health.

We should be ready, like Jesus to go through some tough times when the Lord makes us go through as a loving father does. Yes, it hurts our father as much it hurts us when we suffer. However, He knows that when we come out of the suffering, we will be as pure as gold, ready to be used by Him. He is more concerned about what the suffering brings forth than about the suffering itself.

Our spiritual well-being matters more to Him than any other thing. To Him the highest priority is to make us more like Jesus. This is the longing of a loving father. If we have to become more like Jesus, then we should also be willing to take the path taken by Him.

The Lord is ready to make us more like Him... Are we ready and willing?

The way of the cross is the way of Jesus. Which way are we willing to take?
The narrow way or the broad and easy way?

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